

## REVELATION – TO WHOM ADDRESSED?

Recently, in October, 2023 my wife and I were part of a group of about 20 in Saudi Arabia to see the real Mt. Sinai, the split rock, the place where they crossed the Red Sea. **SLIDE 1** It was fascinating and inspiring to see those sites and there will soon be Finish Faithful episode about what we saw and learned there. After that, I met my daughter in Turkey and we drove around to the cities of the 7 churches mentioned in Revelation 1-3. **SLIDE 2** At each location we took photos and made videos about the messages to those churches to put up on Finish Faithful.

This is the first of several episodes about Revelation 1-3. In many Christians circles Revelation doesn't get much attention. In other circles, perhaps they talk about it too much. We can certainly live and grow as believers and followers of Jesus Christ by studying and applying what is written in the gospels and the epistles. I was taught that is exactly what we should do and that Revelation is about what happens after the Rapture or gathering together, so we need not concern ourselves very much with it. We will look at that question in this episode.

In this episode, I will address some of the reasons why some people believe that Rev 1-3 are not for the church today and explain why I think it is for the church. We immediately recognize that Rev gives a much different portrayal of our Lord Jesus Christ than we see in the gospels and the epistles. As McLaren's Expositions says, "This grand vision, which forms the introduction to the whole Book of the Apocalypse, gives us indeed the Lord Jesus clothed with majesty and wielding supreme power, but it also shows us the old love and tenderness." The messages to the 7 churches in chapters 2 and 3 have some stern rebukes about what the Lord sees going wrong, but each invites repentance, endurance, faithfulness and promises great reward.

Scholars disagree on whether Rev was written by the same John who was with the Lord Jesus and wrote the Gospel of John. I personally think it was the same John, but I will not offer any evidence to support that. There is also debate about when it was written. I will take the position that Revelation was written later—probably around 95 AD, after Jerusalem had been destroyed, as Jesus said it would, the nation of Israel had been dispersed and the other apostles had been martyred. The various Christian communities had been started 35 or 40 years before. There were tens of thousands of Christians. These communities had organized and established traditions of how they practiced their faith. The devil had had more time to mobilize deception and heresies, such as Gnosticism and to provoke persecution in the Roman Empire. It had been 30 years since the great fire in Rome which Nero blamed on the Christians.

1:3. So I am blessed by reading this to you. Maybe you should read these slides aloud and get blessed. More likely, this was read out loud to the congregation. They didn't all have individual copies and many could not read. So the angel or messenger who reads it aloud is blessed and so is the congregation that is participating in the reading.

Let me also say the some of these symbols and messages go deeper than we will cover. I certainly do not have complete understanding and if these episodes are too long, many people

will not want to watch them. As we have throughout FF, we will go for the low hanging fruit. And that's ok, because this book was meant to be understood by regular believers at that time.

Keeping things simple, if you were John and you got this revelation and these instructions, would you send what you wrote to these 7 churches. If you were a leader in one of these 7 churches and you read this, would you think the Lord Jesus Christ meant this for you? Of course you would!

Now there are theories that these messages are not for the church, the body of Christ, and we will look briefly at the main such theory with which I am familiar, because I believed it for years and was utterly convinced it was right. Some of you watching this came from the same background and I will share with you what changed my mind on this.

The chain of command is so clear here.

Can we imagine John did not send the letters?

Can we imagine these churches who read or heard did not think they were addressed to them?

It says to keep what it written FOR THE TIME IS NEAR

It is always helpful to try to understand what issues the writer or speaker is addressing at that time and what is in the mind of the immediate audience

So how come some people say this is not addressed to the church? They say Rev 1:10 It's all about the day of the LORD and church not involved. They say the messaging does not seem to match up with Epistles of Paul—particularly since Rev talks about works and enduring, whereas, they would say, Paul's epistles assure us that we are saved by grace and works are not involved.

We are going to talk quite a bit about a Bible scholar named EW Bullinger. May seem strange if you have never heard of him, but many of his teachings and theories were the basis of what I was taught during the first 10 or 20 years that I was studying the Bible.

Bullinger is emphatic that Revelation is not for the Church and it concerns the fulfillment of His plans and prophecies concerning Israel. He writes, "Our great fundamental proposition— which we may as well state at once— is, that The Church is not the subject of the Apocalypse"

Bullinger, E.W., Commentary on Revelation, p.3

I loved reading Bullinger and have his Companion Bible and most of his other books. He writes Then I read it after becoming convinced that the rapture is not before the final 7 years and the church is spoken of in Revelation.

EWB correctly points out that Revelation has a distinctly different character from the epistles in the NT. The epistles are the loving exhortation from Paul or Peter or John or James as apostles and brothers on a human level. Revelation is from the resurrected, glorified Lord Jesus Christ speaking from heavenly level as head of the church. It contains lessons in Christian living, but its main emphasis is on judgements that will occur in conjunction with the Return of Christ. There are more Old Testament references than any other book in the New Testament (285 compared to 92 in Matthew and 102 in Hebrews). I would say this is because it is clearly showing how Jesus the Messiah will fulfill all that the Old Testament prophets have said and restore the earth

God's original plan of man having dominion on earth under God's sovereignty. It unifies the Bible by repeatedly presenting Messiah Jesus, the Lord of the Christians, to everything the OT said that the LORD God of Israel would do to restore the earth to His original plan of man having dominion on the earth under God's sovereignty.

It is important in Bullinger's argument (and most other pre-trib arguments) that Revelation is about The Day of the LORD, which is after the rapture or gathering together, and thus does not concern the church. So the meaning of The Lord's Day in Rev 1:10 is crucial to this argument.

Day of the LORD vs Lord's Day. Two different Greek phrases.

"The Greek phrase translated the Lord's day [tē kyriakē hēmera] is used only here

And is different from the one translated

'the Day of the Lord' [tē hēmera tou kyriou] , or [hēmera kyriou] ;

Acts 2:20; 1Th. 5:2; 2Th. 2:2; 2Pet. 3:10

When did the church start to use the term the Lord's Day for Sunday. There's no question that they did, you can only argue about when.

- Christians met on the day after the Sabbath because Jews couldn't go places on the Sabbath and that is the day Jesus arose.
- So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and \*said to them, "Peace be with you." John 20:19
- On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together a to break bread... Acts 20:7 Paul at Troas
- On f the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up. 1 Cor. 16:2

Didache is an early Christian writing that refers to the first day of the Week as The Lord's Day. If it was written before Revelation, that would be important evidence that John could have been saying he had this vision on a Sunday on the Isle of Patmos.

- Didache was a manual for how to conduct church. It is logical that such an outline would have been useful to early churches that did not have access to all NT scriptures.
- Scholars used to date it as mid second century but now think it was earlier
- Mentions apostles and prophets traveling around
- No mention of gnosticism or other later heresies
- No mention of destruction of Jerusalem around 70 AD
- Does not mention persecution or falling away

The Bible says Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever.

We can't love the Jesus of the 1<sup>st</sup> coming and be lukewarm or repelled by the Jesus of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

- and some to the church as a whole.